

NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
POLITICAL FEATURE NO. 1-1622
CHRIS KERN/BALTIMORE

OCTOBER 12, 1976

ELECTION '76: THE BLACK VOTE

(EDITORS: THIS IS THE FOURTH IN A SPECIAL SERIES OF REPORTS ON THE AMERICAN ELECTION CAMPAIGN AS SEEN FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A PARTICULAR LOCALE OR VOTER GROUP.)

ANNCR:

IN THIS LATEST OF A SERIES OF REPORTS ON HOW PARTICULAR VOTER GROUPS IN THE UNITED STATES VIEW THE NATIONAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN, CHRIS KERN REPORTS FROM BALTIMORE, MARYLAND, ON SOME OF THE ATTITUDES OF THAT CITY'S BLACK POPULATION.

VOICE:

ELEVEN PERCENT OF THIS COUNTRY'S POPULATION IS BLACK, AND BALTIMORE IS TYPICAL OF MANY OF THE PLACES WHERE THAT BLACK POPULATION IS CONCENTRATED. THE CITY IS A MAJOR EAST COAST SEAPORT, AND ITS SHIPBUILDING COMPANIES AND STEEL MILLS HAVE ATTRACTED BLACK WORKERS FROM THE SOUTHERN STATES. ITS INNER CORE IS ALMOST FIFTY PERCENT BLACK AND ITS SUBURBS ARE MOSTLY WHITE. THE BLACK POPULATION CONTAINS A RELATIVELY HIGH PROPORTION OF UNSKILLED OR SEMI-SKILLED WORKERS, AND SO THE CITY'S BLACKS ARE RELATIVELY POOR AND -- MOST IMPORTANT FROM A POLITICAL STANDPOINT -- RELATIVELY UNEMPLOYED. THE HEAD OF THE URBAN STUDIES PROGRAM AT BALTIMORE'S MORGAN STATE UNIVERSITY, HOMER FAVOR:

TAPE: CUT ONE -- FAVOR (1:13)

"IF WE LOOK AT THE UNEMPLOYMENT RATES AMONG OUR YOUNGSTERS IN THE INNER CITY OF BALTIMORE AND OTHER GREAT METROPOLITAN AREAS, THEY HOVER SOMEWHERE AROUND FORTY-FIVE PERCENT . . . SINCE 1954, AND THIS IS 1976 -- THAT'S TWENTY-TWO YEARS -- THERE HASN'T BEEN A SINGLE YEAR IN WHICH THE BLACK COMMUNITY HAS HAD AN UNEMPLOYMENT RATE BELOW THE LEVEL OF SIX PERCENT. NOT ONE. AND ANYTIME IT GETS ABOVE FOUR PERCENT (OVERALL), WE GET A LITTLE QUEASY AS A NATION. SO THE BLACK UNEMPLOYMENT

TAPE: (CONT'D)

RATE ALWAYS RUNS TWO, TWO AND A HALF TIMES AS HIGH. . . . THIS ALSO LEADS TO A GREATER PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOR FORCE ON THE PART OF THE BLACK FAMILY, AND SO WE KNOW, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT IT TAKES TWO EARNERS IN A BLACK FAMILY TO EARN AS MUCH AS THE WHITE HEAD OF A HOUSEHOLD WILL EARN. SO A LOT OF TIMES WHEN PEOPLE POINT OUT THAT THERE'S BEEN AN APPRECIABLE RISE IN THE NUMBER OF BLACK FAMILIES EARNING OVER TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS, THEN I HAVE TO COUNTER BY SAYING HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE NECESSARY TO EARN THAT KIND OF LIVELIHOOD, BECAUSE WE KNOW THAT THE DISPARITY BETWEEN WHITE AND BLACK MALE EARNINGS IS STILL VERY PRONOUNCED, WITH BLACKS EARNING SOMETHING LIKE SEVENTY PERCENT OF WHAT THE WHITE MALES EARN."

VOICE:

ECONOMICS DOMINATES CONVERSATIONS WITH LEADERS OF BALTIMORE'S BLACK COMMUNITY: UNEMPLOYMENT, LOW WAGES, THE AMOUNT OF GOVERNMENT WELFARE PAYMENTS TO THE POOR. REFERENCES TO OTHER ISSUES ARE RELATIVELY RARE. EVEN PUBLIC SCHOOL INTECRATION -- THE GREAT CIVIL RIGHTS ISSUE OF THE LAST TWENTY YEARS -- NOW TAKES SECOND PLACE. AND THERE SEEMS TO BE A NEW MOOD AMONG AT LEAST SOME OF THE CITY'S BLACKS WHEN THE SUBJECT OF INTEGRATION COMES UP. IT'S ALMOST A RETURN TO THE "SEPARATE BUT EQUAL" DOCTRINE THAT THE SUPREME COURT RULED UNCONSTITUTIONAL IN ITS FAMOUS 1954 DECISION. VERNON DOBSON IS THE PASTOR OF BALTIMORE'S UNION BAPTIST CHURCH. LIKE A NUMBER OF MINISTERS IN BALTIMORE'S INNER CITY, HE IS A LOCAL POLITICAL ACTIVIST. AND WHEN HE DISCUSSES INTEGRATION, HE SOUNDS SURPRISINGLY LIKE MANY SUBURBAN WHITES.

TAPE: CUT TWO -- DOBSON (0:41)

"ONCE THEY START PROVIDING EQUAL FUNDS SO THAT EVERY CHILD IS EDUCATED TO HIS POTENTIAL WHERE HE IS, THIS QUESTION OF INTEGRATION DOES NOT BECOME A PROBLEM. I'LL BE DAMNED IF I WANT TO GO TO A WHITE SCHOOL, BECAUSE THAT'S GOING TO IMPLY TO SOMEBODY THAT WHITE PEOPLE ARE GOING TO MAKE ME BETTER. I THINK I'M AS BRILLIANT AS ANY WHITE MAN ANYWHERE.

TAPE: (CONT'D)

I DON'T NEED TO SIT BESIDE HIM IN A CLASS FOR THAT INTELLECT TO COME FORWARD, TO BLOSSOM OUT. I DO KNOW, HOWEVER, THAT WHEN A WHITE KID GOES TO A BLACK SCHOOL OR A BLACK KID GOES TO A WHITE SCHOOL, IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO SEGREGATE FUNDS. YOU CAN'T DISCRIMINATE AGAINST THE BLACK BECAUSE THEY'RE SITTING THERE TOGETHER. SO THE FUNDS MUST BE EQUALLY DISPENSED."

VOICE:

BUT TO VERNON DOBSON -- LIKE THE OTHER BLACK LEADERS WE TALKED TO -- IT'S THE GOVERNMENT'S TREATMENT OF THE POOR AND UNEMPLOYED THAT'S MOST IMPORTANT IN THE NATIONAL POLITICAL CAMPAIGN. AND WHILE MOST AMERICANS SEEM TO THINK THE DIFFERENT ECONOMIC POSITIONS OF THE TWO CANDIDATES ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS IN MAKING A CHOICE BETWEEN THEM, THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT NEITHER PRESIDENT FORD NOR JIMMY CARTER HAS IMPRESSED THE INNER CITY BLACKS. DOBSON THINKS BOTH CANDIDATES ARE MAKING A MISTAKE.

TAPE: CUT THREE -- DOBSON (0:49)

"I HAPPEN TO LIVE IN THIS CHURCH COMMUNITY THAT IS BOTH BLACK AND WHITE, AND WHEN HE MAN OVER ON EUTAW PLACE (A WHITE NEIGHBORHOOD) COMES TO THIS CHURCH TO ASK FOR SOME MEANS FOR JUST MAKING IT, HE IS NO DIFFERENT THAN THE BLACK WHO WANDERS IN HERE AND ASKS FOR SOME FOOD, SOME SHELTER OR SOME EXTENSION TO HIS WELFARE GRANT. AND MORE AND MORE, YOU'RE SEEING PEOPLE WHO ARE CAUGHT UP IN THIS VICIOUS CYCLE OF UNEMPLOYMENT THAT IS SUPPOSED TO DO SOMETHING TO REDUCE INFLATION IN THE MIND OF FORD. AND IT ISN'T DOING IT. WHY DON'T THEY TALK ABOUT THAT? AND JIMMY CARTER HAS DUCKED THE ISSUE. FORD DOESN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THE ISSUE. AND I THINK BETWEEN THE TWO, YOU'VE GOT TWEEDLEDYDEE AND TWEEDLEDYDUM, AND THERE'S NOTHING EXCITING TO BLACK VOTERS."

VOICE:

BLACK AMERICANS HAVE VOTED OVERWHELMINGLY FOR THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY IN RECENT NATIONAL ELECTIONS, AND THERE'S NO REASON TO THINK THEY WON'T DO SO AGAIN THIS YEAR. PRESIDENT FORD SEEMS TO BE PERSONALLY UNPOPULAR IN BALTIMORE'S BLACK

VOICE: (CONT'D)

COMMUNITY, BUT THE REAL REASON WHY HE HAS LITTLE CHANCE OF WINNING ANY SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF VOTES HERE IS THE REPUBLICAN PARTY'S PRO-BUSINESS, ALL-WHITE IMAGE.

BUT TO SAY THAT JIMMY CARTER WILL GET MOST OF BALTIMORE'S BLACK VOTE ONLY ANSWERS HALF THE QUESTION ABOUT WHAT THIS VOTER GROUP IS LIKELY TO DO ON ELECTION DAY IN NOVEMBER. BECAUSE LIKE THEIR WHITE COUNTERPARTS, MANY BLACKS APPARENTLY DON'T INTEND TO VOTE. MOSES NEWSON, THE EDITOR OF THE BALTIMORE AFRO-AMERICAN, THINKS THAT BLACK NONPARTICIPATION COULD ALTER THE ELECTION RESULT.

TAPE: CUT FOUR -- NEWSON (1.00)

"THOSE WHO VOTE WILL VOTE DEMOCRATIC. UNHAPPILY . . . WE HAVE HAD SOME VOTER TURNOUTS WHICH HAVE NOT BEEN WHAT WE NEED, BOTH LOCALLY AND ON A NATIONAL LEVEL. THIS HAS BEEN TRUE OF WHITES AS WELL AS BLACKS RECENTLY, AND I SAW A STUDY NOT TOO LONG AGO WHICH INDICATED THAT, THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES, THE TURNOUT THIS FALL COULD BE LOWER THAN FIFTY PERCENT. NOW I DON'T BELIEVE THAT, MYSELF. I THINK IT'S GOING TO BE HIGHER THAN THAT. BUT I THINK CARTER'S ELECTION DOES HINGE UPON THE EXTENT TO WHICH BLACKS TURN OUT. MOST POLLS ARE SHOWING NOW THAT HE AND FORD ARE RUNNING ALMOST NECK AND NECK IN THE WHITE COMMUNITY, AND WITH BLACKS VOTING POSSIBLY EIGHTY TO EIGHTY-FIVE PERCENT DEMOCRATIC THIS YEAR, HIS ELECTION COULD WELL HANG ON THE EXTENT OF THE BLACK TURNOUT."

VOICE:

NOT ALL BALTIMORE'S BLACKS ARE POOR OR UNEMPLOYED OR EARNING LESS THAN THEIR WHITE COUNTERPARTS. BUT THERE SEEMS TO BE GENERAL AGREEMENT THAT THE CHOICE OF A NEW PRESIDENT IS MEANINGFUL TO THIS CITY'S BLACK POPULATION IN DIRECT PROPORTION TO HIS COMMITMENT TO SOLVE THE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS OF INNER CITY RESIDENTS. PROGRAMS THAT WOULD DO THAT ARE

VOICE: (CONT'D)

CERTAIN TO BE EXPENSIVE. THAT MEANS MOST VOTERS ARE LIKELY TO OPPOSE THEM, WHICH IS WHY THE PROBLEMS OF THE POOR HAVE NOT PLAYED AN IMPORTANT PART EVEN IN JIMMY CARTER'S CAMPAIGN.

MR. CARTER MAY NEED A LARGE BLACK VOTE TO WIN. BUT THERE APPEAR TO BE A LARGE NUMBER OF POTENTIAL BLACK VOTERS HERE IN BALTIMORE WHO COULD SIT THIS ELECTION OUT.

-0-

NES/GH/RTD